



MEDIA RELEASE

STATE OF TENNESSEE
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE AND INSURANCE

TENNESSEE EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS BOARD

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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VoIP 911 FALLS SHORT, NOT ALL CALLS TREATED AS EMERGENCIES

Nashville, TN. - Tennesseans who get their telephone service over the internet may be in for a potentially tragic surprise when dialing 911 in an emergency situation.

Usually when a person dials 911 from their home telephone, the call is routed over a special 911 trunk to an emergency call taker at a local 911 call center and the caller's address and phone number are automatically accessed. However, for some Voice Over Internet Protocol users ("VoIP"), there's no guarantee that when they need it most, they will even be connected to a live, 911 call taker.

Voice Over Internet Protocol is a new technology which allows users to place and receive telephone calls over the internet. The service is less costly than traditional landline and wireless phone service, but commonly it is not set up for traditional 911 service.

"This puts 911 back in the stone ages," cautions Randy Porter, Chairman of the Tennessee Emergency Communications Board. "VoIP callers dialing 911 should receive the same service as any other 911 caller. If they don't, you could have a serious tragedy on your hands."

This routing scheme can have catastrophic results; administrative lines are for non-emergency calls. True emergency calls, those coming in on dedicated 911 trunks, are always handled first by professional call takers. Secretarial staff will not necessarily answer calls on administrative lines except during business hours with any degree of urgency -- or at all. Such calls may result in busy signals or the caller may automatically be placed on hold.

Recently in Maury County a person called 911 from a VoIP phone routed into the 911 call center's administrative line. The caller was a young mother who feared her home was being burglarized. She was not aware that her VoIP phone did not have traditional Enhanced 911 service. Although the call was eventually referred to the proper authorities, this situation could have ended in disaster.

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The Tennessee Emergency Communications Board serves as the state's authority for E-911 issues and financial oversight of the state's 100 local emergency communications districts. For more information visit our website at: www.state.tn.us/commerce/911.